

(Washington, D.C) -- Congress adopted legislation authored by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk permitting the President to raise the reward for the arrest of Osama bin Laden from \$25 million to \$50 million. The Counter-Terrorist and Narco-Terrorist Rewards Program Act doubles existing rewards for information and increases by nearly 10 times rewards offered in the past as part of the State Department's Rewards for Justice Program.

Kirk's legislation was enacted as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Bill for FY 2005 passed over the weekend. The law also permits payment of rewards for the arrest of drug kingpins who finance terror. Rewards may also be paid with goods, such as a truck or tractor that can be more meaningful to rural families living in remote regions than money.

"My legislation provides another powerful tool for the United States to use in the war on terror," said Congressman Kirk. "During a mission to Pakistan's border with Afghanistan earlier this year, I saw that these reforms were needed to improve our prospects for arresting the world's most wanted man. I will return to Pakistan and Afghanistan in January to make sure U.S. officials and our allies make quick use of the new rewards program."

The State Department has paid over \$57 million for rewards leading to successful arrests. Such arrests include Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the 1993 World Trade Center bomber, and Mir Amal Kansi, who murdered Americans outside the Central Intelligence Agency in 1993. State Department rewards also helped in the arrest of United Nations war criminals in Yugoslavia and operations that led to the death of Saddam Hussein's two sons, Uday and Qusay.

Under the old law, the United States is offering \$25 million rewards for the arrest of terrorists Osama bin Laden and Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi. There is also a \$10 million pending award for the arrest of Mullah Omar, the Afghan leader of the Taliban. Details on the rewards program are provided at <http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/>.

Beyond raising the top reward, the legislation made critical reforms to improve the ability of the United States and our allies to attack organizations that fund terrorism. After September 11, 2001, Osama bin Laden lost access to his family fortune and donations from Europe. He now depends on profits from the sale of heroin to fund terror. In December, the U.S. Navy arrested Al Qaeda operatives who were shipping heroin, hashish and methamphetamine to the UAE. By allowing the payment of rewards for the arrest of drug kingpins that finance terror, the United States can strike more effectively at Al Qaeda's new narcotics profits.

“During my last mission to Afghanistan, I learned about one narcotics ring that provided \$28 million a year to Al Qaeda,” Kirk said. “The 911 Commission estimated that the attack on the World Trade Center cost just \$500,000. We need to attack narcotics kingpins that are now financing terror. This legislation provides a powerful new tool to do that.”

Kirk also outlined the role of this legislation in rebuilding Afghanistan. “In 2002, we destroyed Al Qaeda’s Afghan terrorist training bases. In 2003, we established a new government, backed by elections in 2004. In 2005, we must support President Karzai’s stated goal to arrest drug kingpins and reduce the role of heroin in the Afghan economy.”

The Counter-Terrorist and Narco-Terrorist Rewards Program Act was co-sponsored by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Illinois) and Rep. Tom Lantos (D-California). Rep. Hyde, who chairs the International Relations Committee, was instrumental in the passage of this legislation.

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